

Holmes (J. K.) the Author

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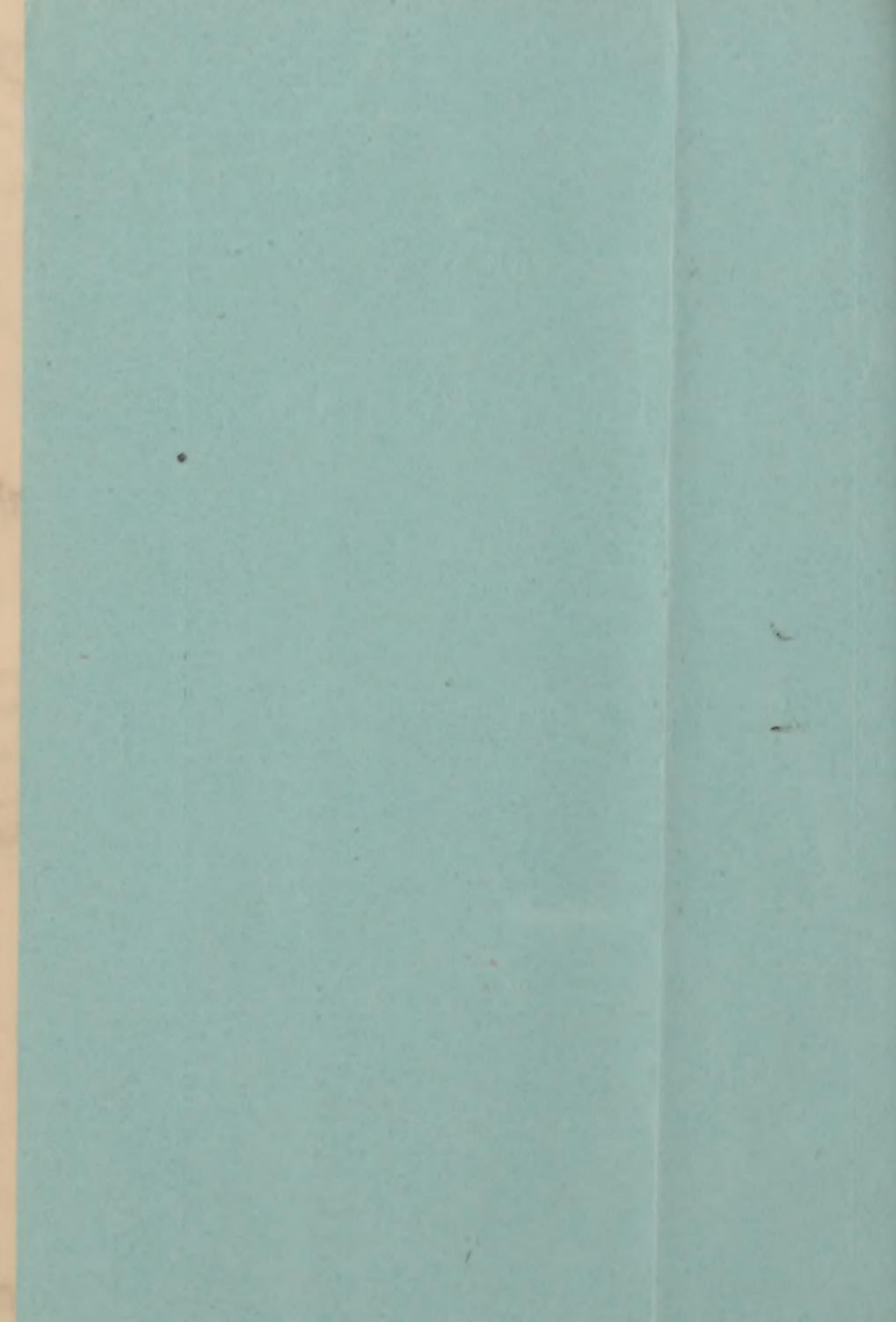


BY

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—NOTE—

Gentlemen of the Canadian Medical Association,— When, a year ago, you paid me the high honor of electing me to the presidency of this Association, I will not pretend to deny that the distinction that appointment conferred afforded me the most lively gratification, which, however, was qualified by several considerations that were to me of quite a serious character. Not the least of these was the knowledge that I must address an audience distinguished for intelligence and scholarly attainments, both professional and general, and that the learning and ability of my predecessors in office would not detract from the difficulty of the task. Indeed I felt, and still feel, that my chief qualification for the position in which your kindness has placed me is an unswerving interest in the prosperity of this Association, which has influenced so strongly and so favorably the medical profession of this country. While expressing my most sincere thanks for the highest honor at your disposal, I feel sure that the same kindly feeling which prompted its bestowal will render easy the duties

of presiding officer, and that the same zeal which has hitherto marked the scientific work of this Association will characterize the meeting now convened.

Romance and history combine to render the city of Quebec the most interesting spot in Canada, and our Association may well be congratulated on the privilege it enjoys this year of holding its session in a place rendered famous by so many circumstances. The adventurous quest and the indomitable will of the early navigators who laid the foundation of civilization in this country when they planted the colors of France along the shores of the St. Lawrence, may well serve us as models for emulation in our more peaceful search after that scientific knowledge which contributes so much to the happiness of mankind. If our efforts be at all comparable to theirs, equal honors and equal blessings may be expected to result from our endeavors. In this connection I may express the wish that the same spirit of enlightenment and progress that characterizes our parent countries, France and England, may animate their descendants in this young Dominion, and that the Canadian profession of medicine may not be unworthy the great names of Harvey and Laennec, of Hunter and Pasteur. It will certainly contribute greatly to the progress of medical science in this country if the two races whose ancestors have led the van in Europe go hand in hand and vie with each other in creating a professional status here inferior to that of no other country. Some of the means by which we may hope to accomplish this will be the subject of my remarks to-day.

The architect who aims at lasting fame, not only lays broad and deep the foundation of his work, but anticipates each step in the growing structure even to the crowning event of its completion. He selects the material, superintends each process of manufacture, shapes every part, and embellishes the whole until it rises in symmetry and perfection, and stands the glorious and enduring monument of his creative genius. In this land there is arising a temple whose foundation is based upon the accumulated labors of the greatest architects of human happiness. Their names shine with brilliancy unabated all down through the vista of past years, and animate and enlighten all who labor in the same profession, and emulate their achievements. We are the privileged architects of this temple of medicine in our country and generation, and I trust that the marks of our skill may not be indistinguishable in the rising edifice.

The progress of scientific medicine in the recent past is the result very largely of the development of the science of biology which has done so much to establish medicine on a scientific basis. Until the study of life in its elementary forms was rendered possible by modern instruments of precision, empiricism necessarily entered largely into all medical progress, and it was maintained as an opprobrium that medicine was no more than an enlightened empiricism. This is true, but it could not have been otherwise since, until the birth of biology as a science, medical knowledge had either to remain at a stand-still or to progress by a series of empirical jumps which sometimes left it in a more advanced state of usefulness, and sometimes

failed to do so even in the slightest degree. Although empiricism in medicine has been such a laborious means of advancement, we must admit that it generally contained some grains of truth, and that when it failed to accomplish what was expected of it, the reason of the failure lay, not in the worthlessness of the efforts at progress, but in the difficulty of separating the grains of truth from the abundant chaff in which it was contained. Each new fashion, while it has contained some truth, has failed and given place to another little in advance, not because it contained no truth, but because the truth it did contain was incomplete. When, however, the study of biology was established on a scientific basis, medicine, which is but an applied science of biological doctrine, became less empirical and more scientific, and by the aid of physiology and pathology, which are the necessary sequence of biological investigation, has advanced to the present high and satisfactory position it occupies. The very fact that morbid processes are viewed and studied from a physiological standpoint, and are estimated and measured by the laws that govern elementary processes of life, renders it certain that the progress of the recent past and of the present is on surer lines and firmer foundation than ever before, and that the future of medicine will be the glorious sequel of the present, as the present is the glorious sequel of the past. It justifies the belief, that the advantages to the human race likely to accrue from the prosecution of medical studies and investigation pursued on these lines, will be far greater in the future than in the past, that physiology and

pathology, which are but in their infancy, are destined to illuminate the dark places in medicine and reveal the true cause of much human suffering and premature death.

We are accustomed to regard with wonder the achievements of modern invention in the art of war, and to contemplate with amazement the perfected instruments of destruction that strengthen the hands of modern belligerents, but the general who advances to battle with all these at his command has no greater advantage over a barbarous foe than modern medical searchers after truth in the realms of disease have over their empirical brothers of the prebiological period. Possessing these advantages, and stimulated by this prospect, it is reasonable to suppose there will, in the near future, arise men whose investigations, beginning where those of Sanderson, Koch, Virchow, and Pasteur leave off, will be equally brilliant and equally conducive to human happiness and longevity. The country that produces these men will be the country that affords the best medical education to those entering the profession, and that most facilitates original investigation for those who have chosen that field of labor. No physician in this country worthy of the profession to which he belongs can be indifferent to the position Canada shall occupy in the honorable and honored competition in which so many are and will be engaged.

The future of the medical profession in this as in any other country will largely depend upon the natural ability and the mental and moral training in childhood and youth of those entering its ranks;

so that in considering any scheme for the creation of a high standard of medical qualification, domestic training and the plan of education pursued in public schools must be recognized as bearing an important part.

It has been said that poets are born and not made—a saying that is not untrue when applied to medical men, for a combination of mental and moral qualities which cannot be wholly acquired enters into the character of every great physician. It is cause for regret that greater discrimination is not exercised in directing young men in the choice of a business or profession, and that convenience and not natural aptitude should frequently determine a young man's course in life. There are so many examples of men rising from obscurity to great eminence in every vocation, that there has arisen a popular impression that all obstacles and natural defects can be compensated for, or can be overcome, by diligence and perseverance on the part of any aspiring youth. It would be wrong to underestimate the value of industry and high aspiration, but these, while they can improve all and can render mediocrity respectable, can never supply the place of genius. While it is impossible to create genius by any system of training, it is almost impossible to repress it altogether by any carelessness or neglect.

“That many mute inglorious Miltons lie buried in our churchyards, I venture to doubt: the fire of a Burns is not easily hidden under a bushel, but some smaller lights may be quenched, and the best of such men, like Burns himself, may be thwarted and broken in heart.”—(*Dr. Allbutt.*)

Other things being equal, the child who, from infancy, is trained to think and to reason correctly and express its thoughts clearly, will be more likely to attain eminence in mature life in all pursuits of an intellectual character than the child not so trained ; indeed, skilful training in early life is essential to success in persons of average natural capacity, and is of unquestionable importance to all.

The efforts to establish and to maintain an efficient system of education in this country are worthy the highest commendation, but the task is a difficult one, and there is danger of enthusiastic legislators over-stepping the mark and making our sons and daughters mere receptacles of knowledge instead of creators of knowledge, by failing to recognise that it is vastly more important that a man should think and reason correctly than that he be the possessor of multitudes of facts and definitions. Physicians, with such questionable elementary training, are like the artificer well supplied with the tools of his craft but lacking the skill to use them. It is not to such that we may look hopefully for real progress in our science ; they make up the great army of routine practitioners who trouble themselves little with profundities, and are like Dr. Sangrado, who felt quite sure that those of his patients who, under the care of his pupil Gil Blas, died from excessive bleeding and the copious drinking of warm water, did so because this his panacea was not applied with sufficient vigor and determination. It is probably not incorrect to say that most medical men in Canada are of opinion that the chief defect in our school system lies in the over-sight here referred to.

The curriculum for medical matriculants in Canada must create a higher average intellectually among young men aspiring to the profession, but there can be no doubt that a widening of the curriculum so as to embrace a more extensive knowledge of the natural sciences would greatly facilitate the acquisition of knowledge presented to, and required of, medical students. An acquaintance with the laws relating to climatology would serve a useful end in the study of epidemic and endemic diseases, and in an estimate of the influence of climate on disease in general ; an acquaintance with minute organisms and histological structures, such as could be readily acquired in any high school provided with a microscope, would prepare the mental soil for the reception and quick germination of the seeds of knowledge sown by teachers of physiology and kindred subjects in medical schools. The medical student who learns something of biology, of cells and germs, and of bacterial life only after he has entered upon his course of medical lectures, is at a great disadvantage and loses much time in a bewildering effort to master names and technicalities, and I can conceive of no more irksome task for a teacher than to lecture to a class of young men laboring under this disadvantage.

The relations existing between medical schools and licensing bodies in this country are so satisfactory that little desire has been manifested to alter them, and it is beyond doubt that to these relations we owe in great measure the improved status of medical education here.

When the great discovery of Columbus opened to the old world the unknown and virgin resources of the new, the most progressive nations entered eagerly into keen competition for the advantages this discovery presented. National ambition and individual courage and endurance combined towards the great aim and object of colonization and development of natural resources of this continent. The results are patent to all : a newer and greater freedom and civilization in the new world are the rich fruits of these vigorous pioneer efforts and the evidence exists in the glad and prosperous millions of the western world. Analogous to this is the meteoric brilliancy of the discoveries in medical science within the past fifty years. Physiology, pathology, the etiology of disease, physiological medicine, preventive medicine, these are some of the fields laid open to the modern physician, and they leave no lack of opportunity for the exercise of ambition, skill, and philanthropy. Nearly all European nations and the individual States of the neighboring Republic have shown their determination to participate in the honorable achievements in medicine thus rendered possible in the near future. Schools for the pursuit of original investigation have been liberally endowed by these governments, and this liberality has been supplemented by the wise and princely donations of private individuals. Sanderson and Klein, Koch and Pasteur, our own Osler, and many others scarcely less distinguished, are devoting their lives with indefatigable zeal to the elucidation of scientific questions upon which rests the superstructure of medical practice, and they

are enabled to do so only through the liberality of the various governments under which they live. Research of this kind can only be carried on successfully by men naturally adapted to such work, and who are free from the care and anxiety inseparable from the lives of those engaged in the active practice of their profession. Hence the absolute necessity for the endowment of institutions of this character. The large expenditure necessary to the equipment of a laboratory for such work has greatly retarded it in Canada, and until means are provided we must be content to occupy an insignificant place in the great race now being run. Can it be that this country or its wealthy citizens will remain indifferent in this matter, while our nearest neighbor is lavishing millions of dollars to attain honorable eminence in the progress of medical science? Scarcely a State in the Union that has not its well endowed university, and the princely gifts of Cornell, of Johns Hopkins, of Mr. Stanford, of Mr. Vanderbilt and of Sir Donald A. Smith are the great beginning of greater things. Who can estimate the blessings to the human race that must arise from the wise munificence of these noble men! Millions yet unborn shall speak their names with feelings of reverence and love, nor will other monuments be needed to make their names immortal. In this connection, I would suggest that a committee of this Association be appointed, to report at the next annual meeting upon the best means of establishing one or more laboratories where original investigation in medical studies may be carried on.

Medical Societies constitute a most important

factor in the advancement of medical knowledge, and it is much to be regretted that they are not everywhere established. It is safe to say that the maintenance of active local societies contributes immensely to the knowledge of their members by encouraging careful observations in private practice, and more extensive reading and research. Aside from a scientific point of view, the harmony engendered by these meetings eliminates much of the jealousy and misunderstanding that are so humiliating and so subversive of individual happiness and public respect. The general organization of small local societies would be a sure means of improving the representation at the larger ones, and would secure to them papers and discussions of a higher character. Provision has been made in Ontario by the Medical Act for the formation of territorial associations in the different electoral divisions, and in some of them most prosperous societies have existed for many years, and the reports of their proceedings constitute valuable additions to medical literature.

Of all the means of medical progress, few could be more advantageously utilized than the accumulated experience of men in private practice if they could be induced generally to keep a systematic record of their more important cases. Time, skill, and the privilege of post-mortem examinations are essential to the successful recording of cases, and their absence is doubtless the chief cause of the neglect so universal in this matter. Time so consumed would be more than repaid by the increased skill acquired; the high standard of qualification now required of graduates should remove the

second difficulty; and if requests for autopsies were made in all cases necessary to verify a diagnosis or to elucidate an obscurity, the prejudice now existing against them in the public mind would, to a great degree, disappear. Let rural practitioners who underrate their opportunities of contributing to the general fund of medical knowledge, remember that Jenner, McDowell, and Koch were not metropolitan physicians, and were unknown to fame until their great discoveries, wrought out by diligent study and observation, placed them among the great benefactors of mankind. Observation and reflection are the parents of discovery, and never fail to produce their offspring, although the gestation may be long and the labor hard. Every truth so revealed is like a lantern, the light of which may be turned on the dark places of our field of investigation, and new truths stand clear to our mental vision, and we walk boldly and safely on, using each new thought to illumine the obscurity that surrounds and precedes it.

The building up of a science is a slow and laborious process, and facts must be supplied by a multitude of workers. The scholar who deciphers the cuneiform inscriptions of ancient Babylon or the hieroglyphics of Egypt, and contributes to our knowledge of these nations, must be aided and preceded in his work by the archaeologist who discovers, and the laborer who unearths, these imperishable records of past events. So in the building up of medical science, the humblest worker is not to be despised, for his contributions may be and often are essential; but to be available, his thoughts and

observations must be recorded, that they may be weighed and winnowed by those suited to the task.

All who have read the lectures of Murchison on "Functional Diseases of the Liver," of Roberts on "The Digestive Ferments," or of our own Osler on "Malignant Endocarditis," must be impressed by the great impetus given to practical medicine by these, and will need no arguments to convince them of the desirability of the endowment of similar lectureships here. From a literary and scientific standpoint, the advantages accruing to the profession from such lectures would be important, but of even more importance would be the encouragement afforded to the more gifted and aspiring of our own Canadian physicians and surgeons. As Canadians we may feel proud of our country and of its physical and political excellencies, but we may rest assured that, so far as we medical men are concerned, others will estimate us by the reasonable and practical standard of our contributions to medical knowledge and by our scientific attainments. No conservative clinging to obsolete methods on the one hand, or the multiplication of weak meretricious literature on the other, can impose upon the learned in the professional world, and the sooner we create strong incentives to scientific work the sooner will the workers be forthcoming. I would here offer the suggestion that this Association take into consideration the establishment of lectureships similar to those in England and other older countries.

Of all means enumerated for the advancement of medical science, individual effort undoubtedly

ranks first. Associations can teach and stimulate, but they can never supply the place of study and observation. Truth only yields her wealth to him who lays seige to her shrine. Emerson says the hardest task in the world is to think. We try to look in the face an abstract truth, and we cannot do it. The mind swerves from the encounter, and thick darkness prevails. We return to the charge and try to force Truth from her citadel, and then in a moment, when we least expect it, a rift in the cloud comes, a ray penetrates our minds, light floods in more and more, until objects, dim at first from sudden light in dark places, become real shapes, and we gauge their dimensions and estimate their proportions with unerring exactitude. Few truths are discovered but by this laborious process, and because we evolve them slowly and often only partially by delving beneath the surface of things, it is better to labor so than not to work at all, for when the surface is broken and disturbed, others will see clearly what we only half perceive, others will perfect what we are able only to dimly outline.

It requires no prophetic eye to perceive the future greatness of Canada. Her vast extent, and varied and inexhaustible natural resources, every where abounding, are such that it would seem impossible for any series of unfortunate events to stem her progress, or to divert her course in the contest of nations for pre eminence in all that constitutes true greatness. The spirit of progress is abroad and armed with the all compelling weapons of modern invention, hampered by no medieval absurdities, and thwarted by no ignorant prejudices;

we are justified in entertaining the most exalted and hopeful view of the future of our country, and may deem ourselves fortunate in bearing a part in the development of so fair a heritage. As physicians, the part we assume is not an insignificant one. To enact wise laws, to encourage commerce, to preserve peace within our borders, and to command the respect of neighboring nations are objects worthy of the most exalted ambition and the most patriotic determination ; but will it be said that the aims of medical science are less exalted or less conducive to national prosperity or individual happiness ? To cure disease, to alleviate suffering, to extend the limit of human life, to enlarge the field of human usefulness, to be able to prevent disease by removing the cause ; surely the profession that devotes its energies to the accomplishment of these objects is entitled to the fostering care of governments and to the liberality of wealthy citizens.

“ A sound nation is a nation that is composed of sound human beings, healthy in body, strong of limb, true in word and deed, brave, temperate, sober, chaste ; to whom morals are of more importance than wealth. It is to form character of this kind that human beings are sent into this world, and those nations who succeed in doing it are those who have made their mark in history. They are nature’s real freemen and give to man’s existence on this planet its real interest and value.” (*Froude.*) In the not-distant future this Dominion will be the home of fifty millions of people with all the wealth and all the greatness that implies ; a thought that may well inspire us with feelings of pride and satis-

faction ; but the wise man will not be so much impressed by the vastness of our territory, the multitude of our people, or the size and wealth of our cities, but will be more concerned in the problem of the social advancement, the civil liberty, the physical perfection, the scientific status and the moral rectitude of our teeming population. When that time comes may the science of medicine have contributed its share towards the creation of a people unsurpassed for physical perfection and mental sprightliness and for all those virtues that are born of these. Should these hopes be realized, then indeed would happiness prevail and prosperity sit as a ruling genius on the brow of every hill, the bosom of every lake and the bank of every stream ; and the application to our country of the language of one of England's greatest poets would scarcely be considered hyperbolical, when he says :

" All crimes shall cease and ancient fraud shall fail,
Returning Justice lift aloft her scale,
Peace o'er the world her olive wand extend,
And white-robed Innocence from heaven descend."

